

787 incessantly. After a time a spirit might appear to him. Perhaps this would be on the first or second night, perhaps later. Sometimes it was in full daylight, and the man really saw the spirit like a true person; but more usually he saw him in his sleep. It might be a person that appeared, that is to say, an untrue person (spirit), or an animal, or the spirit of a rock or of the brush. Some men went to islands and rivers instead of to mountain-peaks. These might receive the otter, or the beaver, or the muskrat, or the water-monster (bax'aaⁿ) as their guardian spirit. Sometimes when a man was crying on a mountain-top in a thunderstorm, the thunder (bax'aaⁿ) appeared to him. The lightning shot straight towards him, as if to hit him, and the bird was so near above his head that the man sometimes became afraid and ran away. If he staid, the thunder-bird became his spirit, and gave him medicine that was unusually powerful. Generally, it seems, the man cried incessantly, until he was exhausted and fell asleep. Then the spirit appeared to him, saying, "I pity you. What do you want?" The man said that he wished to be wealthy, or successful in war or love, or to become a medicine-man. If he was to be a doctor, the spirit showed him roots and plants, telling him to note their appearance, and informing him of the diseases for which they were a cure. Those plants that he had seen in his dream or vision, the new doctor looked for until he found them. His spirit told him, "In so many years (naming the number) you will begin to doctor." After that time had elapsed, he began doctoring. The spirit or animal told him that the place where he was was its own home. From this time on, the man never killed the animal that had appeared to him (except, apparently, for the purpose of obtaining parts of it as a fetish or amulet); nor did he eat of it under any circumstances. He used a part of the animal, especially the claws or the fur, in his doctoring. If the spirit of a rock had appeared to him, he used a stone.

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755 Medicine-men cured the sick by sucking the body and by brushing it. As is customary among Indians, they were believed to suck through the skin without biting, cutting, or puncturing it. They might suck blood, pebbles, cloth, human finger-nails, bunches of hair, and many other things. If they sucked out old pus, it was evidence that the disease was of long standing. If they brushed or rubbed the patient, they used owl-feathers, skunk-skin, prairie-dog fur, or similar parts of animals. Some used bells as rattles, some whistles, and some drums; and all sang, each doctor having his own songs. After sucking the patient, the doctor chewed up medicine, which he then applied to the patient's body. He often also gave him medicine boiled in water to drink. The powers of doctors varied. Different men were able to cure different diseases. It is said, however, that none could do much for affections of the ear.

1908.]

Kroeber, *Ethnology of the Gros Ventre.*

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A man who pledges and erects a sweat-house does not participate in the sweating. He makes the fire, heats the rocks and passes them into the house, raises and lowers the blankets, and performs other services.

In sweating, animal tails were sometimes used to beat the body with. Fig. 43 shows such an implement, made of the tail of a buffalo, on a stick-handle cased in the skin of the tail. This object is similar to the Arapaho specimens described in the "Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History" (Vol. XVIII, p. 316), but is noticeable for the shortness of the hair on the tail.

When people were called to come to sweat, *hixteib'nix'a't* ("Above-Nix'a't") was first called to sweat with them. Then the people were called. This personage, whose name also means "Above-white-man," is said to have been prayed to before the whites were known; but the Gros Ventre, like the Arapaho, state that they do not know whether he is identical with the *Nix'a't* of their myths. Ordinary prayers were always addressed first to *hixteib'nix'a't* or to *iccanānin* ("our father"), then the sun and moon would be mentioned, next the sacred pipes, and then the earth. After these had been mentioned, anything else could be prayed to.

A charm tied on horses to make them run fast consists of rabbit-feet painted red and tied together. The Arapaho used rabbits' feet for the same purpose.

Specimen Museum No. 50 1804 is a pair of wild-cat-tails worn by young men at the shoulder, or at the heel of a moccasin. They were also tied to children's belts, next to the skin, in order to keep them from wetting the bed.

Specimen Museum No. 50 1903 is a gorget (commonly called by the Indians in English "moon-shell") said to have been made in the old way from an intervertebral disk of a buffalo. At present these objects are usually slightly concave, and are made of china.

The Gros Ventre, according to Dr. Clark Wissler, call certain corrugated fossil stones "thunder-stones." The Assiniboine seem to use the same name. The Blackfeet, who perhaps have most developed the cult of these objects, call them "buffalo-stones." A specimen from the Northern Arapaho is shown in the "Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History" [These are probably *AMMONITE* septa. - *Analyst*]



FIG. 44 450-4280).
Thunder-stone. Necklace.
Length, 21 cm.

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775 An old man relates that he once saw something that he thought was a spirit. In full daylight he was hunting horses, and came on a ridge where there were a few pines, while below there was a flat and a stream. Down there he saw a dead cottonwood aflame and a person by the tree who was burning it. Limbs fell down burned off. He thought that it was some one from his own camp who was burning the tree; but he lay down and watched. The person took a fallen limb, carried it to the stream and threw it in, and he could hear it splash and hiss. He saw this a second time and a third time, but, happening to turn his head, when he looked back there was no one there. He waited for some time, but the person did not reappear. Going to the stream, he saw the burned branches and the tree still afire.

[821] The Milky Way is called tsöökanihyaaⁿ ("ghost road"). The dead travel by it.

MYTHOLOGICAL BELIEFS.

776 Bax'aaⁿ is the name of the water-monsters inhabiting rivers, as well as of the thunder. The water-monster is also called byiigaⁿ. It is the enemy of the thunder. This idea is common in the Plains tribes, and it seems probable that the relation into which the thunder and the water-monster were brought through this general idea of the opposition between them, is what has resulted in one name being applied to both of them by this tribe. The description of the water-monster is the usual one. It is long, snake-like, and black, with a long head and turned-up nose and horns. It causes the death of all persons who drown.

That persons drowned are taken by a bax'aaⁿ is believed the more because the monsters are said to have hands like a person. As they have long, sharp teeth, and are known in one recent instance to have eaten a buffalo, it is supposed that they eat the persons whom they drown.

773 A hunting-party once saw a water-bax'aaⁿ being carried away through the air by a cloud which extended downward toward the earth. They saw the monster writhing, and turning its tail.

776 A hunting-party once killed a buffalo at the edge of a river. They were cutting the meat when they saw waves approaching the buffalo. The water rose and was pushed toward the buffalo until it covered it. Then the water receded, and they saw a water-monster lying eating the buffalo. One of the men said he would kill it. The others urged him to desist; but he shot, and struck the animal between the eyes. Then, as it writhed, he declared he would despatch it with his knife. Again they tried to dissuade him; but he said, "I have come to seek death, and am not afraid." Taking his double-edged knife, he killed the monster, and dragged its tail out of the

1908.]

Kroeber, Ethnology of the Gros Ventre.

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water. He was regarded as having done one of the bravest deeds imaginable. This animal had crooked horns, a body and tail like a snake, long teeth, short legs, and hands like a person. According to another version of this incident, the warrior approached the monster, which thereupon retreated into the water. Then he hid behind the buffalo, and when the monster reappeared, shot it, and then despatched it with his knife. 773 776

When one of the present old men of the tribe was a young man, a party, all of whom he knew, went to war. They came to a dry lake to the south of the present reservation, in the centre of which there was a small pool of water. Not having seen any buffalo on the way, they were very hungry. So when they found a bull standing by this pool, they killed him. Thereupon they saw that his legs were quite short and his hair long. One of the party said, "He is something strange. Let us not eat him." But another said, "We are too hungry. We will eat anything." And he stuck his knife into the bull's belly. Water immediately spurted out, and came in enormous quantities. The lake rose rapidly, and the men fled with the water at their heels. The lake-bed was a large one, and when they finally came to the bank enclosing it, and jumped up and crawled above, the water dashed against the bank.

The father of the same narrator was with a war-party when they came to a dry lake. They saw three stones in a row, and from the traces left on the ground saw that the stones were moving and that they were something wonderful. The whole party stripped naked and made sacrifices to them, and began to cry before them. Thereupon the water began to rise in the dry lake, and approach. All became afraid and ran off, except one man, who remained by the stones. When the stones were covered with water, they saw that the offerings that they had made moved toward the centre of the lake, although the water was flowing from the centre toward the edges. The one man who had remained continued to cry without fear, until the water reached his neck, when it stopped.

Some women once saw a *bax'an* in a spring from which they were getting water. For some time they were unable to move. When they finally succeeded in escaping, no one would any longer approach the spring. The women had seen only the monster's head.

An old man tells that once the camp moved, and at dusk came to the edge of a lake. The tents were not put up, but the people slept in the open air. It was winter and the lake was frozen. At night the narrator was awakened by a terrible roaring and crushing, as if the ice were breaking up. He did not need to wake any one else, for every one had been aroused by the noise. He told every one, "It is the water-monster. Be still." Early in the morning he went to look, and where the noise had been heard there

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was a clean cut through the ice, about two feet wide, the path of the monster. It had moved about in the lake until it reached the bank above which the people were sleeping. The monster had struck this bank, the impression of its head and two curved horns being visible. Then it had turned and gone back to the centre of the lake, and there disappeared, making another path, on each side of which the ice was piled up. The narrator gave to it several pieces of property.

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It is said that it is not known whether thunders have ever been seen; but old men say that they have seen marks on the ground where one is thought to have alighted. The grass about was scorched, and two zigzag lightning-marks, each forking at the end, extended in opposite directions along the ground.

The people were once camped east of the present reservation. A terrific rainstorm came and passed over them. When they thought it had gone by, there was a fierce clap of thunder, and a man and his wife and their boy were struck by lightning. The man and boy were killed, but the woman is still alive. There were two small holes in the tent, and through the bedding into the ground there extended two small holes of the size of a small calibre bullet-hole. On another occasion, a woman was untying a curtain at the back of the tent in order to keep a bed dry, when lightning struck the tent-pole, and she was killed. The other people in the tent were merely stunned.

Not many years ago a strange thing happened to a man and a woman still living. During a thunderstorm the woman, who had been sitting at the door, went to the back of the tent and sat beside her husband. Lightning struck the tent, and shot a hole through every metal plate, cup, or dish on the ground. Where it entered the tent, it left a mark like a sword. The people then painted the tent dark-blue.

A woman out mourning for her mother on the prairie saw a small thunder-stone (hax'aaⁿayāⁿ). It was creeping slowly, leaving a trail or mark. The woman thought she would leave it, and pick it up later. When she came to the place again in the evening, the stone had vanished. Its trail was still visible, but ended where she had seen it last.

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The rainbow is called hax'aaⁿayāⁿ ("thunder's fishing-line"). Nāyāⁿ seems to mean any fishing-implement.

The whirlwind is called ināācītāⁿ. This is also the name of a red legless water-worm (not a leech).

The three stars of Orion are called "buffalo-bulls." The two below them, to one side, are hunters who were going to shoot them and suddenly found themselves in the sky.

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The Gros Ventre once lived far north of where they are now, where there were nothing but forests. There they found a metallic object. The object

Childhood

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system of discipline, but it was not like that of the white man. The Indian used his roaring voice and stinging words. When I was a boy there was one old man who had a crippled hand. On various occasions when we were told to keep quiet and we disregarded that appeal, that old man would sneak up to us and roar at us. Sometimes he would bluff mischievous boys by telling them: 'Come over here. I am going to work you over with this crippled hand,' but nobody would dare go near him. Then he would say: 'Well, give me one arrow apiece. I won't work you over this time—but next time I will surely do so!'

The bugaboo was used to threaten small children when they misbehaved. They were told that "someone" would come and take them away in a big sack. The story told by Singer and Coming Daylight regarding the bugaboo was that of a woman who put her disobedient son outside her lodge and this, "someone" came along with a sack, put the child in it and hung the sack in a tree. Aside from this bugaboo, Coming Daylight could recall only one instance from her childhood where she was threatened through reference to "spirits." This was after she had swam the whole width of the Missouri River and back. She was, and still is, very proud of this feat, but her grandmother was angry with her for having been too bold in going so far. She scolded her saying: "Why did you do that? Don't you know there are all kinds of 'animals' in the deep water? They always grab what they want!" Sometimes, however, punishment in the form of "something awful will happen" was indicated for the wrong doer.

One point on which Coming Daylight and the other old women were extremely emphatic was that in the old days the Gros Ventre never tried to scare children by mentioning the Supreme Being in connection with punishment. These old women recalled that in the lectures they heard, and in the scoldings they received, the emphasis was much more on social motivation. Children were told: "Nobody will like you if you do so and so." Or: "People don't like anyone who is onery. They like those who are generous and kind." Self-regarding motives were stressed in some situations. "Don't gamble lest you lose something we value," "Do what is right so as to keep your man," "Be industrious so as to show off what a good worker you are," "Don't run around with

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CHAPTER I

SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

Before beginning our description of Gros Ventre ritual observances, it seems desirable, in the interests of order and clarity, to give some account one by one of the various Gros Ventre supernatural beings. These beings may be divided for our purposes into three categories: first, those to whom cult in the form of prayer or sacrifice was offered; second, those to whom no cult proper is offered but who enter in one form or another into ritual or who are conceived as actually helpful or harmful to the living Gros Ventres of modern times; third, those to whom no cult is rendered, who do not enter into ritual at all, and who, while conceived as helpful or harmful to the Gros Ventres at some time in the remoter or archaic past, are not so and have not been so in more recent or modern times. Beings of our third category belong rather to the realm of folklore or traditional history than to that of religion and will be given only passing attention here.

The chief beings of our first category are: the Supreme Being, the storm being, the sun, the earth, the Four Holy Men, Broken Knife, He-who-starved-to-death, the Last Child, the water monster(s), Little Spirit, He-who-dreams-of-Bha'a, the ghost helpers, the beings who gave power, the petroglyph beings. We shall now take these up in order, giving for each their names, nature, attributes and functions. The rites connected with them will be described in later chapters.

THE SUPREME BEING

The most common name by which the Supreme Being was called or addressed was Ixtcibani:hohat (Above Ni:hohat).¹ The

¹ Cf. Kroeber, 1908, p. 275. In our transcription, a, e, i, o, u, have continental values: ä is flat as in English "bat"; é is close to French "feu"; vowels are lengthened by a colon, as a:; ə is the unstressed indeterminate vowel; θ is th as in English "thing"; tɕ is a single sound as ch in English "church"; tɕ̥ is the same sound but glottalized and occurs only terminally; apostrophe indicates glottal stop.

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776 second element in the word is the name of the culture hero and trickster, who in the early mythical period taught the Gros Ventres how to pray to the Supreme Being, and how to make a living. The present-day Gros Ventres can give no clue to the etymological meaning of the word *ni:hohat*, nor can the writer analyze it. The word is also used for spider. The spider is in a certain sense sacred and, if it is killed, rain comes. The spider, the Gros Ventres say, can in spite of its small size do wonderful things with its web, can make it stay anywhere, can climb up and down it, and, in general, is usually master of the situation. The name of the trickster *Ni:hohat* is ordinarily translated as "white man" by English-speaking Gros Ventres and the translation is derived from a folktale concerning an escapade of *Ni:hohat* in which he had his hair cut off.² Thus it was that when the Gros Ventres first saw the white man with his hair cut short, in contrast to the Gros Ventres' long hair, they called him by the name of the trickster. Consequently, the name for the Supreme Being *Ixtēibōni:hohat* is often rendered in English as "The One Above the White Man" or, in abbreviated form, "The One Above."

The second name for the Supreme Being is *Behā:tixtē*. The meaning, "the master, boss, head, leader of all" is quite clear (*be:-*, *be:hi*, "all"; *ānā:tixtē*, "he is master, boss, head, of group or organization").³

The third name *Ni:nānā'ātē*, is said to be an older form which was still in use in the lifetime of The Boy and Thick, and it was felt that it had the meaning of "study, think, meditate," and that the whole might signify "the being who has control over everything by thought or will,"—a concept which, it may be added, would be quite in keeping with the Gros Ventre idea of the power of sheer thought or thought-wish by human beings. But this

² Kroeber, 1907, pp. 72-73, gives a version of this episode which is substantially the same as the one obtained by me.

782 ³ In 1948 The Boy stated that the Gros Ventres addressed the Supreme Being by this term "when they wanted something big, e.g. when they prayed for a good harvest of all the things the earth produced. Thus we are saying a kind of mass prayer indicating that the Supreme Being owns everything. He made it and he owns it, and it was recognized that they depended on him." [R.F.]

Supernatural Beings

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analysis was given by our informants with a good deal of hesitation. The form of direct address, Ni:nānā'an, was not used at the sacred pipe rites nor in trivial matters, but in grave emergencies, —in very solemn oaths or vows, extreme danger in battle, critical illness,—which concern the life or welfare of human beings. 776 ●

The fourth form of address used for the Supreme Being was Iθna'an "our (inclusive) father." This name was in use as far back as our oldest informants, Coming Daylight and Singer, could remember. The Gros Ventres are quite aware that their close linguistic and cultural kin, the Arapaho, use the name "father" for the Supreme Being. The Gros Ventres, however, unlike the Arapaho, never call him "grandfather."

Finally, the Supreme Being is also spoken of as initci:t nihone:honixtē (life, he owns) "owner, or master of life," a common expression to or of the Supreme Being among other Algonquian-speaking peoples. [171]

The Supreme Being, unlike the culture-hero, had no wife or children. He does not figure at all in the Gros Ventre folklore, nor even in the origin myths to be given later, except insofar as the culture-hero taught the people to worship him. The Supreme Being's appearance was completely unknown; the culture hero who taught the people to pray to him did not describe how he looked; and in all the folklore and sacred stories of the Gros Ventres there is no record of the Supreme Being having a body or taking material form or appearing in dream or vision in material form. As The Boy put it: "If anyone had ever seen the Supreme Being, he would have described how he looked, and this story would have been handed down as the biggest one in all the Gros Ventre tales."

The nearest to such is a story regarding the first Catholic priest* 776
who came to the Gros-Ventres when The Boy's father, Lame Bull 797
(born 1824) was a young man old enough to remember the event well. At first the Gros Ventres said: "The Supreme Being has come down from above. He is the priest." The Supreme Being

* Cf. Kroeber, 1908, p. 275.

* Cf. Cooper, 1934, p. 71.

* Cf. Flannery, 1953, p. 20.

● 776 was supposed to have come on earth far up north, and to have made the rounds of all the tribes, finally reaching the Gros Ventres.
797 The Gros Ventres at first so called the priest, but when they discovered that he ate and slept like themselves, they ceased calling him by this name.

776 In the sweatlodge rite, to be described later, the first of those invited to sweat was the Supreme Being.¹ In how far such an invitation was anthropomorphically conceived is hard to say; it need not, of course, necessarily have implied anything beyond symbolic deference.

The Boy and Thick stated: "He is not a 'false person.' He is entirely in a class by himself. We think so much of him that we do not dare to try to learn what he looks like. We class him as a kind of shadow. He is the most wonderful and powerful of all beings who have no bodies."

[778] No statues or images or pictographs of any kind were ever made of the Supreme Being, nor were there any symbolic representations of him.

[782] The Supreme Being was alone and one, and, as compared with other sacred or superhuman beings of religion, myth, and folklore, he ranked first. Where prayers included invocation of more beings than one, the Supreme Being's name always came first; in ritual invitations before sweating or partaking of food, he was always invited first. He was, however, much more than *primus inter pares*. He was in a class by himself as not only the most powerful but as the ultimate source of the power possessed by other beings and as the ultimate ruler and controller of these others. Bha'a, the Storm Being, who ranked next in importance to the Supreme Being, was controller of storms, thunder and lightning, and exercised a certain limited autonomy. He had this power and office, however, not of himself, but by delegation from the Supreme Being, and exercised it as the agent of the Supreme Being, as will be explained more fully later. Then, too, while the Gros Ventres through fasting and crying on the hills or prairie sought supernatural power, not directly from the Supreme Being, but from other beings—animals and others—it was the Supreme Being who

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¹ Cf. Kroeber, 1908, p. 275.

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had given to these beings the power which they in turn gave to humans. 776 ●

The Supreme Being resides up above but he is in no sense identified with the sky or firmament or with any heavenly body. He is quite distinct therefrom, and in particular, quite distinct from the sun. "The sun is his work, his property like," according to Singer. Al Chandler stated, "If he did not want the sun to shine or to perform whatever duties it has, it couldn't do these things." While he resided up above, he could be prayed to from anywhere. In this sense he was not localized, whereas many other beings such as power-bestowing ones, were sought out in their particular dwelling places and there prayed to.

Children were taught that the Supreme Being looked down on them from above and saw and heard all that they did, both good deeds such as charity to the needy, and evil ones such as stealing, even when the children thought they were quite alone and unobserved.*

The Supreme Being was emphatically the owner and master of all things, of the universe, the supernatural beings, as above stated, human beings (not merely the Gros Ventres), the animals, the earth, the heavenly bodies. All informants fully agreed on this. As The Boy reasoned it out: "He was master of everything on the earth and above, even of the spirit world, and not merely of the Gros Ventres, but of everybody."

Whether he was conceived of as the maker or creator of all things is not altogether clear. Three or four of our best informants stated categorically that "He made all things." He was "the creator of all things," "the ruler of all and creator of everything." "He made the earth," "He created us." There is some confusion, however, partly at least on account of the role of Earthmaker (see below, p. 23).

The Supreme Being was actively interested in the welfare of human beings, first of all as the giver, protector and master of life, and as the donor of food, but also as the source of supernatural power and of wealth.

* For a discussion of difference in point of view between men and women informants, see Flannery, 1953, pp. 169-70.

6. *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part II, Religion*

776 He was the "master of life" as previously mentioned. Long life was the result of something more than conformity to "health rules," such as daily morning cold baths to harden the body.⁹ "The Supreme Being allows people to live long. If he wanted, he cut off their lives." "When people die, it is the Supreme Being who cuts off their lives." "Very old people lived a long life because they were pitied by the Supreme Being." The Boy's father, Lamé Bull, said that "a man lives, not his own life, but according to what is given him and wished by Ixtcibani:hahat. A man has what he has by the wish of the One Above."

776 The Gros Ventres understood by that that the aged had survived to old age not by accident, but by the permission and wish of the Supreme Being. It was common for young men to approach in tears a very old man or woman, offer a pipe, and request him or her to ask the Supreme Being to grant him long life, to make him a good warrior who would be immune to arrows or bullets when he was shot at.¹⁰

776 In grave illness the Supreme Being would be appealed to to spare the sick person's life. It was a common belief that the Supreme Being would not permit a large attacking force of enemies to slaughter a smaller number at home in its own camp. When a group of young Gros Ventre recruits was leaving for World War II, the Supreme Being was prayed to in an old song that he would watch over them and let them come back home unharmed; although there were some casualties among Gros Ventre soldiers in World War II, not one of the above particular group was even wounded.

776 The Supreme Being as the one who "owns everything" was the provider of food. He was not called "master of food," as was common among the northeastern Algonquians,¹¹ living closer than the Gros Ventres to a scarcity economy; food, it was felt, was "too little" a thing, and the title undignified. But all good things to eat, including "wild" food such as berries, fruits, roots and tubers, came from the Supreme Being and were given by him.

⁹ Cf. Flannery, 1953, p. 144.

¹⁰ Cf. Flannery, 1953, pp. 195-96.

¹¹ Cooper, 1934, p. 71.

Supernatural Beings

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Supernatural power too, while gotten immediately from animals, 776
 mountains (mountain spirits), and other creatures, through fasting
 and sleeping out on the hills, came ultimately from the Supreme
 Being, as mentioned previously. A person going out on a power 782
 quest, would pray first to the Supreme Being to command or 787
 compel the lesser being to give the power being sought. Power to
 doctor and to achieve war success and even to acquire wealth thus
 in the last analysis came from the Supreme Being. So too did
 the (supernatural?) power inherent in earnest wishes or thought
 wishes.

The Supreme Being also imparted knowledge and warnings to 776
 human beings through dreams and through his messenger, the 787
 crow. The crow on account of his relationship to the Supreme
 Being was a sort of sacred bird.¹² To illustrate the point the Boy 825
 told the following incident in the life of his father, Lame Bull.
 "Lame Bull on one occasion was sitting out on a hill and no one
 could get him to come back to camp. So some of his family got
 one of Lame Bull's wives, The Boy's mother, to go out and tell
 Lame Bull to come home right away as the camp was moving.
 As Lame Bull saw her coming, a crow flew over to him and said,
 'This person who is coming is going to tell you something that
 is not true. Don't pay any attention to her.' Then the crow flew
 away. When The Boy's mother came within hearing distance of
 Lame Bull, the latter said to her: 'Don't say what you are going
 to say. Turn back.' But she kept on coming and told him her
 message, for which she got a scolding from him."

In general the Supreme Being was, as regards his interest in 776
 human welfare, the reverse of an otiose deity. His interest was
 a most active one.

Equally active was his interest in man's moral and social be- 888
 havior. He was pleased at such moral or social acts as respect 736
 and help to the aged and care of the orphans, and was offended
 by grave breaches of the moral or social order. He bestowed

¹² In 1948 The Boy explained: "The crow is not the kind you see around
 here now, but a raven,—a bird that is smaller and more streamlined than
 the crow. The crow here in the fields cry like they are wounded, but this
 other bird has a shrill but melodious call more like a human being." [R.F.]

8 *The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part II, Religion*

- 776 reward and punishment for such human behavior exclusively or almost exclusively in this life. At death the souls of all except
 [775] murderers went to the same spirit habitat, not to the Supreme Being.¹³

The extensive cultural and ethico-social activities of man towards the Supreme Being will form the subject of succeeding chapters. We may merely state here that the Supreme Being easily held the first place in cult, as compared with other beings, and that he bulked large in the Gros Ventre ethico-social conscience.

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 174 That the foregoing concept of the Supreme Being was aboriginal with the Gros Ventres and not the result of borrowing from white sources seems clear beyond reasonable doubt from both the external and internal evidence.

797 First the external evidence. While the Gros Ventres have been known in our literature since 1751, their contacts with the whites before the middle of the last century were relatively slight. They met traders and trappers and an occasional intermarriage with whites occurred, but active missionary work among the Gros Ventres did not begin until 1884.¹⁴

Of about twenty different informants from whom we gathered our account of the Gros Ventre Supreme Being concept, most were older people, men and women, between the ages of 60 and 90 (in 1938-40) and all of them were positive, from their own memory of pre-missionary days and/or from what they had always heard from their parents or grandparents or other elders, that the belief was part of ancient native tradition and not one derived from the whites or from missionaries. For instance, Bull Head, about 80 years old in 1940, then the oldest living Gros Ventre man, stated that he had known about the Supreme Being as far back as he could remember. Coming Daylight, then about 85, and of

[821] ¹³The older name for the abode of the dead was tsəci:tan (etymology unknown to informants) but described as "toward the sunset." The more common name was ba:snabe (big sand) which was described as a place "to the north." The Milky Way was called Ghost Trail according to another tradition. No non-human supernatural being was conceived of as in charge of the future abode or as rewarder or punisher of the dead for earthly deeds.

¹⁴Cf. Flannery, 1953, p. 23.

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keen intelligence and memory, stated the same, adding that her old grandmother was also familiar with the name of Ixtcibani:hohat for him. Furthermore the names for the Supreme Being as believed in by the Gros Ventres are commonly used for him among the Arapaho. Finally, the Gros Ventre concept itself of the Supreme Being tallies well in its main elements with the concept that is of universal or almost universal occurrence among the Algonquian-speaking peoples, to whom the Gros Ventres belong linguistically and, in spite of their dominantly Plains culture, in not a few important respects culturally as well.

The internal evidence corroborates the external. The whole Gros Ventre complex is quite lacking in distinctive Christian elements,—such as prayer to the Supreme Being for forgiveness, reward and punishment by him in the future life, going to the Supreme Being after death, the Trinity, a supreme evil spirit, and so forth,—elements which would be emphasized in most evangelization by Catholic missionaries. On the contrary, the complex has a distinctly aboriginal coloring. Mastery, including mastery of life, is to the fore, with making or creating hazy or in the background. The Supreme Being's names, apart from that of Father, seem clearly native, not white. It is certainly most unlikely that missionaries would have invented a term such as Ixtcibani:hohat by compounding the name of the trickster, whose vulgar and obscene escapades were matters of such common knowledge.

Finally, the Supreme Being concept is tied intimately into the whole ritual of the Gros Ventre, a ritual which itself is obviously aboriginal, with only the faintest traces, if any, of Christian infiltration.

OTHER CULT BEINGS

Next to the Supreme Being, the supernatural being most frequently mentioned by our informants was Bha'a,¹⁹ the storm ruler or the thunderbird. He was also called, less commonly: etcitane:

¹⁹ Informants insisted on the aspiration in the name of the thunderbird, bha'a. Without aspiration the term ba'a means "it is red," and the term ba'ats, means "blood."

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- 776 bātē, "he (who) has gristle (tendon from back of neck of animal) nose," and "black hawk," a certain very large black-feathered hawk known also locally as "bullet hawk" (*Buteo sp.*). Another name for Bha'a was "old man four parts of the earth." Bha'a, the thunderbird, as was appropriate, had dark or black feathers, and was a swift flier; his bill and feet were of the same material as back tendon (see Blood-Clot Story, No. 11 in Appendix).

778 In the Gros Ventre Sacrifice Lodge, or "Sun dance," Bha'a
 776 was represented near the top of the center pole as a bird, painted
 796 black, with a buffalo tail fastened to his head as a sort of plume,
 with a zigzag line descending from the bird almost to the ground
 and ending in a fork, and with a bunch of branches stuck in the
 fork of the center pole of the lodge to represent Bha'a's nest. Each

[302] of the dancers painted all over in white had a bird representing
 Bha'a, painted in black with charcoal or paint on his upper center
 breast, with black zigzag lines ending in a fork from the bird's
 wings down each arm and forearm and from the bird's feet down
 each thigh and leg to his ankle, with a black zigzag line forked
 at each end across the forehead, and with a vertical red zigzag
 line forked at the lower end extending down from each eye. The
 drum-head used in the Feathered Pipe rite had a red background
 [534] on which the Thunderbird was represented in blue, with a yellow
 zigzag line on either side from the head to the wings. Bha'a entered
 prominently into both the Sacrifice Lodge and the Feathered-
 Pipe rite.

776 Any large strange animal might in the olden days be called
 725 Bha'a or even be looked upon as an embodiment or theophany
 of Bha'a.

One supposed theophany over which the present day Gros
 Ventres laugh heartily, is recorded on the occasion of their seeing
 their first mule. The story as told with verve and intense amuse-
 ment by The Boy was as follows:

"The Gros Ventres used to move around a great deal. Once a
 mule, the first one the Gros Ventres had ever seen, got lost some-
 how, struck the Gros Ventres' trail, came to their camp and
 stopped. A Gros Ventre crier spied it and came back to camp

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announcing 'A something has come to camp. Come and look at it.' 776
 Everybody turned out. They sized up the mule and considered 825
 that it must be a Bha'a. They said: 'He must have come here for
 a purpose. Let's offer him things.' So they ran back, got things
 to offer him, returned bringing the children, and walked up and
 surrounded him. They prayed to the mule and laid one offering
 on him. Soon he was loaded down, he just stood there. After a
 while he brayed, at which all the people scattered and ran away.
 After they came to a stop, however, they decided: 'He must be
 pleased. That's why he made that noise. He will grant our request.
 We'll leave him here and move camp.' So they moved at once.
 But the mule followed them. Then they became afraid and ran
 away from him. This happened several times. At last they suc-
 ceeded in hiding from him and losing him."

Bha'a's residence or nest, as described in the story of Blood- 776
 Clot, was on the top of a high mountain, where he dwelt with his 821
 mate and their two offspring, the young thunders (bha'a:niðan;
 -iðan, offspring, children). In the Blood-Clot story the sign of
 Bha'a's return to the nest was the appearance of a dark heavy
 cloud toward the sunset (west); of his mate's return, a white cloud
 in the west, and the arrival of each was marked by a blinding
 flash of lightning. The Thunderbird sometimes breaks wind and
 leaves a very bad odor. Two instances of this were recorded,—
 one when lightning struck Thick's house and left such a smell.

Bha'a had jurisdiction and control over storms, thunder and
 lightning, but as previously stated under the paramount rule and
 control of the Supreme Being, for whom he served as a sort of
 agent or subordinate, although with a considerable degree of
 freedom of action.

According to The Boy: "Bha'a has control of lightning and
 thunder, rules it, and releases it at will. He controls it, he is a
 sort of general manager; some one still higher controls Bha'a.
 While Bha'a rules the storm, he does so by a sort of delegated
 power; he has not the power himself.

"Bha'a's particular job is the storm, thunder and lightning.
 That is all he does. The Supreme Being is the ruler and uses
 Bha'a to run this part of the situation and manage it. Bha'a

776 executes the direction or will of the Supreme Being. He is the
 821 medium or means by which the Supreme Being works. When a
 [782] big storm is about to break, a pipe is filled and the Supreme Being
 is prayed to in the direction from which the storm is coming and
 is asked to spare the people during this storm, to direct Bha'a
 not to kill them, to say a word or two to Bha'a himself not to
 shoot around too close to camp. The people are afraid of Bha'a
 since he does his job in such a violent way. Even though Bha'a
 is held in high esteem and is considered an extraordinary being,
 he is a creature [under control] of the Supreme Being."

776 Bha'a was closely associated with the Feathered Pipe, not at
 all with the Flat Pipe.

Bha'a too entered into the Sacrifice Lodge ("Sun dance") as
 the being who could cause rain and so bring a good season for
 the food quest and bring coolness and shade in hot weather. While
 supernatural power was not explicitly sought from Bha'a he
 might occasionally on his own initiative have pity on a man and
 give him power to be a great warrior and even to make storms.
 [726] But on a war expedition the participants would pray to the
 Supreme Being to be saved from wounds and death; not the
 slightest thought of Bha'a would enter their minds unless they
 were overtaken by a bad storm.

[465] It may be added here that, while violent thunderstorms are
 common in Gros Ventre territory, deaths from lightning are not
 frequent. The Boy could recall only three such deaths, occurring
 in Gros Ventre territory during his experience, two on one oc-
 casion when he was a young boy and one on a later occasion
 around 1930.

The word Bha'a is used not only for the Thunderbird but enters
 into the term also for the water and earth monsters, bha'anbi:'iöän.¹⁰

The water monster,—or monsters as there appear to be a
 number of them, for they are reported from various large rivers,
 and springs where they bathe,—is usually envisioned as a huge,

¹⁰ The Boy explained in 1948: "The word bi:'iöän includes water bugs,
 crawling bugs, bugs of all kinds; but a snake is never called bi:'iöä, nor
 will a snake ever be called bha'a. Water monster, no manner how many
 horns he has, or however much he resemble a snake, is always called
 bha'anbi:'iöä." [R.F.]

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long, more or less serpent-shaped, being with pointed snout and tail, and with a horn or two horns in its forehead. It lives in its lodge under water, is occasionally seen, snatches bathers or swimmers, and carries them down to its underwater dwelling. Drowned persons are supposed to go to or to be captured and held by the water monster in the after-life. The people made offerings to the water monster or to its youngest offspring, the Last Child (see p. 15), when crossing rivers and on other occasions. 776 [775] [782]

There is a close connection between Bha'a the Thunderbird on the one hand, and these water and earth monsters on the other, but they are quite distinct. During storms the Thunderbird may strike a monster and carry it away as game food up into the clouds to its own mountain-top nest. There is no explicit note of hostility toward the monster.

The following story may illustrate ways of the water monster and the Thunderbird's habit of preying on the water or earth monsters.¹⁷

When The Boy's father, Lane Bull, was a young man, in the 1840's, three young Gros Ventre younger than Lane Bull,—two of them relatives of Lane Bull,—had gone on a war party down toward the Yellowstone River. The Boy told the story: "They ran before the oncoming storm to take refuge among the rocks on a knoll. When they got within about 100-150 yards of the knoll, lightning struck. All three lost consciousness for a moment and, when they came to, were facing the opposite way. They turned around to go to the rocks on the knoll. As they did so, they saw a cloud right over the knoll and heard a noise as of a struggle going on in the clouds. The cloud started to rise and as it left the ground they could see something hanging down from the cloud, with its head in the cloud. As the cloud went up higher, they could see that the something was some kind of monster, with colors like a snake and striped. The cloud rose higher and higher, seeming to be taking a great monster out of the knoll. Finally the lower end of the monster came into view, struggling as it were. The struggling monster was immense, snake-like in build 776 539

¹⁷ Cf. also Kroeber, 1908, pp. 278-80.

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539 with a tapering tail. The cloud kept going straight up, the three young men waited until it had disappeared from sight up in the sky and wondered where it was taking the monster. Then they looked toward the spot out of which the monster had been pulled and they saw smoke and blue flame there and smelt a bad odor. They tried to coax themselves to walk up close to the spot and get a good look at it. But one of them said: 'Don't go. Something might happen to you. You can go if you wish. I'm going way round this spot.' He left and the others later joined him without going close to the spot."

Singer had heard the following story and knew the principal actor. "Some men on a war party went to a stream and noticed that the water was disturbed by something rolling,—a water monster with a horn in the middle of its head. All were scared except one, who said: 'I am scared of nothing. That is why I came on a war party.' He shot the monster right in the forehead and it whirled like a top. They took it out of the water. It had one horn. They thought it was the being who owned the stream. The others in the party thought this deed would shorten the brave killer's life. But he lived to be a real old man."

Cora mentioned the following incident: "My uncle on one occasion went out hunting for game in the Sweet Grass Hills. A violent storm arose and while he was loading the meat on the horses, lightning struck close by. The people say that the thunder pulls big 'bugs' called thunder bugs out of the earth or water. My uncle saw this bug as it came out and went wriggling up and up, until finally he could not see it any longer. You can see the holes in the earth from which the thunder bugs come."

Coming Daylight told of her own experience: "After a storm, the people used to go out and look for traces and I once saw one of these ditches. The thunder is supposed to be some kind of a big bird and it goes way up on top of the highest peak to eat these bugs it pulls out of the ground. The old-timers saw one place where the thunderbird had eaten one of these 'worms' and there was nothing but the bones of a great big 'bug' lying there [fossil vertebrate remains?]."

"A water monster was once seen in the Milk River by a small

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boy. He was so scared, he went insane and died in a few days," 776 ●
according to The Boy. 539

One story we gathered is about a very big rattlesnake, "as big as a person," big enough to eat a human being and leave only the skeleton. It had a large shining horn. When it traveled it made a great bare trail like a modern road. It was horned, but was not of the water or earth monster "species." It was shot dead by a young man whom it had molested with murderous design while he was out in the hills crying and sleeping to obtain supernatural power.

In one story, the following, told by Singer, it is not clear whether there is question of a gigantic horned snake or of an earth monster proper.

"Near the head of Snake Butte there is a big cleft which runs all the way to the bottom. The cleft is said to have been made by lightning striking there. My husband Ax Hand [Assiniboine] was there and looked. He thought he saw something and looked again. It was a great big snake with a horn on the top of its head. He was scared and ran away." [823]

A somewhat conspicuous, though very human, role in Gros Ventre ritual and thought was played by the Last Child, *ida:sša*, (itase, "lastly," itasünna, "last;" -tha, "child" [Sifton]; apparently meaning "last child born in a family"). He was the little water snake, offspring of the water monster who figured in the story of He-who-starved-to-death (see No. 5 in Appendix). The Last Child had power in water, sharing to an undefined subordinate degree in the power of his father, the water monster, who was ruler under the water. He, alone or together with his father, was prayed 776
to or given offerings, when the Gros Ventres had to cross rivers 782
or lakes or when they swam or bathed in rivers or pools, lest they [484]
drown or be snatched down by the water monster. Early in World War II when a batch of Gros Ventre recruits was about to leave for overseas duty in the Pacific he was prayed to to protect them in crossing the ocean. In praying with a pipe, the Gros Ventres always held it up first to the Supreme Being, but lastly down to the Last Child. In food offerings, the Last Child was invited, 776
last in order, to partake. In the sweat lodge he was mentioned.

776 but not invited to sweat, as he was not considered important enough. In general, while he very frequently enters into ritual, he always enters as the last and least. The water monster was rather feared, but the Last Child was conceived as benevolent and kindly disposed, and both in and outside of ritual observances ran a marked undercurrent of indulgent affectionate amusement, such as the adult male might have toward a liked small child, especially where the Last Child was ritually or otherwise associated with the Supreme Being. The Boy said: "The Gros Ventres all but laugh when the pipe is offered to the Last Child. He suggests something sort of funny to them, while they have only deep reverence for the Supreme Being." As Tom Main put it: "The Last Child [comparatively] does not amount to much. He is [782] always mentioned last [in prayers], but he gets the benefit of tobacco put in the ground [when medicinal herbs are gathered] and food put there [in food offerings]. As far back as I can remember, the people used to laugh when the Last Child was mentioned, but nevertheless he was included in rites." This by no means signifies however that he was laughed at or made fun of. The Last Child was, it would seem, a sort of intercessor with his father, to temper the latter's rather maleficent and predatory tendencies.

The Last Child was also associated in some manner with the earth or perhaps with the earth monster(s), as food and offerings [782] were put into the ground for him,¹⁸ but the nature of the relationship is not clear. One statement given earlier, that he had a kind of keepership of the earth, looked after it, saw that the grass and trees grew, that the rivers flowed, and so forth, while not contradicted, was not confirmed, by later evidence.

776 Regarding the earth, that is, the land or ground, rather than
823 the terrestrial globe as such, there appear to have been differences in ritual usage and perhaps in belief. Some of the Gros Ventres did not mention earth in their prayers. Others habitually did so, naming in order the Supreme Being, the sun, earth, and the Last

¹⁸ In 1948 The Boy added: "Nowadays when they smoke, they offer him one too; and also with whiskey, they spill a little on the ground and say: 'Ida:sa for a drink.'" [R.F.]

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Child, and made offering of tobacco and food to earth. Al Chandler explained: "The earth is put in because that is where your living is. You get everything from the earth, fruit, animals, everything to live on, and get everything you eat from there," although ultimately it is the Supreme Being who owns and gives everything. We got one passing casual reference to "mother earth" by Mary Ercaux, and another by Tom Main to earth as being a "spirit" and having a "special keeper," but obtained no later confirmation of or detailed information on these points. In general, earth seems to have played a quite subordinate role in Gros Ventre religious thought and ritual.

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The sun was appreciably more prominent, ranking according to some informants next to the Supreme Being, and mentioned as "The One Traveling," or "Passing or Traveling Man" immediately after him in prayers. Another current seems to have assigned a much lower relative rank to the sun, and mentioned sun and moon together, as "Those-who-follow-each-other," and after the Supreme Being and the Four Holy Old Men. In any case the sun was in no sense identified with the Supreme Being, but was his property, work and servant, far below him in dignity, and had not anything like the religious predominance it had in such tribes as the neighboring Blackfoot. The sun did not enter at all into the so-called "Sun Dance" of the Gros Ventres, nor into the Feathered Pipe rite. Prayers and food were offered to the sun, and the sun was invited to sweat in the sweat lodge rite along with but subordinately to the Supreme Being. Individuals would offer a finger joint or bits of their flesh to the sun on such occasions as the grave illness of a relative. While the sun "sees everything, that's why the Supreme Being put it there," the Supreme Being, not the sun, was appealed to as witness in oaths; the widespread American Indian oath formula, "The sun sees me," was not used.

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The sun and moon were, according to myth, brothers from the same mother, but were never human beings proper, though they married, the one a frog woman and the other a human female. According to one story, the sun regularly appeared in battle as a man riding a white horse who scared and helped either the Gros

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776 Ventres or the enemy. According to another, the sun on one
 821 occasion delivered seven Gros Ventre men, to be killed by the
 [539] Crow, into the hands of a Gros Ventre woman captured by the
 Crow, so the woman claimed. Apart from the incidental inclusion of the moon, bracketed with the sun, in prayers and in invitations to sweat as above stated, there was no specific independent moon cult and in no case, according to our informants, were sacrifices ever made to the moon. Nor, so far as we could discover, was there any star cult, though the stars, or some of them such as those constituting the Great Dipper, the Pleiades, the Bear were seemingly looked upon as in some sense "spirits" or personal beings. In the archaic era, before the flood and Ni:hahat, people used to go in the morning to get fire from the morning star, "the cross," just as in modern times the old people used to go in the morning to get a live coal from a neighbor's hearth instead of using matches. The morning star served also as a "clock." When people were planning to get up unusually early in the morning they would be guided by its position in the heavens. Someone in the lodge would be told: "Go out and see if the cross is up yet."

776 Among the beings involved in prayers and invited to sweat, after the Supreme Being, were the "Four Old Men," currently referred to by English-speaking Gros Ventres as the "Four Holy Old Men." According to Singer and Coming Daylight there were also, it appears, "Four Old Women," but this statement was not independently confirmed by other informants.

Very little is known about these Four Old Men. The Boy had more than once asked his father about them, but Lame Bull could only say that the Gros Ventres were taught by Ni:hahat to call on them in praying and sweating but that the people did not know who they are. They lived in the very beginning of things, but whether before or after the flood, is not quite clear. They were not human beings. Gros Ventre belief does not associate them with the four winds or cardinal directions, but, vaguely, with the sacred number four, the four "ridges" or stages of full human life, and the four great floods or other great catastrophes or revolutions, of which the first was the primeval flood, that are to occur,

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according to one tradition, in the career of humanity. Some thought World War II was one of these four. The Gros Ventres do not recognize any beings connected or identified with the four winds or four cardinal directions.

Sometimes another being "Broken Knife" was appealed to in prayers. Little too, is known of him, except that he was, some time in the distant past, a renowned Keeper of the Flat Pipe. According to Al Chandler, Broken Knife was the name of the young man who was first given the Feathered Pipe. (For details, No. 6d in Appendix.) He was asked to pray for the supplicants, just as it was customary for the people to ask living pipe keepers or ex-keepers to pray and intercede for them, "much as Catholics ask the saints to intercede for them."

Much more is known of He-Who-Starved-To-Death who is associated with the Flat Pipe rite. He was a human being, a Pipe child, second son of a certain keeper of the Flat Pipe in the days when the Gros Ventres dwelt in a land of plenty. It was he who in the course of his adventures encountered and befriended the Last Child, offspring of the water monster, and who on his return home taught the people to pray to the Last Child, and introduced three songs into the Flat Pipe rite. He was also the man who first brought horses to the Gros Ventres. His name was given him by the water monster. (For details see No. 5 in Appendix.) In one Flat Pipe rite he was mentioned in prayers, and in the sweat lodge was invited to sweat.

Well known too is He-who-dreams-of-Bha'a, likewise a human being and a Pipe child, the son of the couple who were first given the Feathered Pipe by Bha'a, and who lived when the Gros Ventres had already gotten horses and had reached their historic habitat, but before the advent of the whites. He got power from Bha'a to be a great warrior, and he gave himself his name. (For details see No. 7 in Appendix.) While closely associated with the Feathered Pipe, he was not, so far as we could discover, prayed to.

In general, lesser beings that had no human body were called *teiya:tawu:nitā* (sing., lit., "false person": *teiyattawu*, false [Sifton], *initā*, human being). This category included such minor

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- 776 beings as Little Spirit and ghosts, but not such major ones as the Supreme Being and Bha'a.

224 The following story, as told by The Boy, gives nearly all that is known about Little Spirit, etcibotä:t (étc,sä, it is little, bettëtö, spirit [Sifton]).

776 "Long ago, how far back I do not know, Little Spirit made himself the guardian spirit helper of a certain man, saying: 'Whenever there is going to be a famine, call me.' 'What are you?' the man asked, 'Where do you come from?' 'I am Little Spirit, I am from the western wind.' The man who had Little Spirit never called him except when game was scarce and there was danger of famine among the people. Then he would call Little Spirit who would tell them where game was. When this man was dying, he said to the people: 'Whenever you go out hunting, pray to Little Spirit to show you where game is and when you have killed game and gutted it, take a piece of the liver and some of the fat, put in on the west side of the game killed, and say: "Here, Little Spirit, is liver and fat for you."' It was just that one man of long ago, no other, who had Little Spirit as a personal helper. When Little Spirit came, he came as a little whirlwind."¹⁰

Little Spirit was, in accordance with this man's instruction, ordinarily appealed to by the Gros Ventres for success in hunting particularly at times when game was hard to get, and the above-mentioned first fruits sacrifice of liver and fat made to him after game was killed. He was not appealed to on any other occasion.

776 At a number of places in and around Gros Ventres territory are cliffs with incised pictographs on them made by a certain class of "false persons" called tciya:tsine:n "ghost men" or "little men." [172] They were never seen but according to Singer were dwarfish, about 3 feet tall. The Gros Ventres distinguish clearly between such pictographs made by these beings on the one hand and on the other those made by Indians or else tracks of animals in flat rocks. The first are temporary, and change from time to time; the other two kinds are permanent. Gros Ventres have tried to get

[114] ¹⁰ He did not, however, come into the shaking tent as the ghost helper did. The statement by Cooper, 1940, based on 1939 field notes, was an error corrected 1940 in the field.

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power from the "ghost men" by sleeping near their pictographs, but never with any success. One young man, however, once without quest got power in childbirth cases from a boss of little children who appear to him in a dream, and Singer thought these "little children" were "ghost men," but the identification is doubtful. The only message they ever got from the "ghost men" was a request or demand that the Gros Ventres go away at once as they smelt bad or made the place smell bad. On war parties or other occasions, offerings were made at the pictograph cliff to the "ghost men," who would then during the night make new pictographs on the morrow from which the future in the form of good or bad fortune could be easily foreseen by the members of the party.²⁰ 776 ●

Supernatural power was gotten either by quest or otherwise from ghosts or, as more commonly, from non-human beings, such as mountains (or the spirit who inhabited or owned the mountains), rocks, mammals (bear, wolf, weasel, mink, coyote, rat, prairie dog and others), birds (crow, prairie chicken), snakes, spiders and so forth. "These lesser beings, while ranking a little above human beings and possessing certain superhuman powers, were under the leadership and control of the Supreme Being, from whom they had received such powers to be imparted in turn to human beings. Like Bha'a, they were, so to speak, delegated agents and underlings of the Supreme Being, put by him in charge of "the details of the whole situation," as The Boy expressed it. The powers so imparted were of many kinds, to cure, to poison or otherwise harm, to foretell, to become a great warrior, to acquire wealth, to succeed in love and gambling, et cetera, as will be described in detail later. 776 787 788

NON-CULT BEINGS

So much for the beings to whom cult was rendered in the form of prayer or sacrifice. We shall now describe the supernatural beings,—human, "humanoid" and non-human,—to whom no cult was rendered but who entered in one form or other into ritual 776

²⁰ Cf. Flannery, 1953, p. 93.

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776 or who were in some manner actively helpful or harmful in modern times to the Gros Ventres. The chief beings of this second category are: Ni:həhat, Earthmaker, ghosts and owls, Atsa:, the Little People.

The name of the trickster and culture hero, Ni:həhat, has already been dealt with in the section on the Supreme Being. Ni:həhat was also referred to sometimes as "our grandfather." He had a human body but no detailed description of his appearance is current. He had a wife and children. No one knows how he came into existence. He lived before the flood and it is to this antediluvian period that his colorful exploits, largely Rabelaisian, are ascribed.

There is considerable uncertainty and speculation regarding the respective roles of Ni:həhat and Earthmaker in the origin of human beings or of the Gros Ventres, and of Gros Ventre religion, especially the Flat Pipe rite. We shall here give the account from the Ni:həhat tradition, and later that from the Earthmaker one, without attempting a complete reconciliation, which does not seem possible from the available evidence.

773 According to the Ni:həhat folktale cycle, human beings lived before the flood, as is clear from the trickster's exploits.²¹ According to the Ni:həhat origin story, it was he who obtained from a man and woman, of whose origin nothing is known, the magic bladder, and who liberated from the bladder the already existing human beings, the ancestors of the Gros Ventres. Still other human beings existed than the ones who killed the trickster and who in turn were completely exterminated by the liberated people. Ni:həhat taught these ancestors to pray to the Supreme Being. He also instructed them in the sweat lodge ritual, and so in at least this element of the Flat Pipe rite, and also in the rite of sacrificing bits of their flesh. He likewise taught the liberated bladder people the art of war. (See No. 1 in Appendix for full story.)

776 He was killed and came to life again. After this he disappeared, and no one knows what became of him. The Boy personally wonders whether it was Ni:həhat himself who was Earthmaker

²¹ Cf. Kroeber, 1907, pp. 59-75.

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and who was floating on the raft with the Flat Pipe, whether he may then have gone to the whites and taught them, too, how to pray; but all this he considers speculation only.

It should be emphasized that as previously noted, no sacrifices or prayers were ever offered by the Gros Ventres to Ni:həhat himself, nor, it may be here added, to Earthmaker. The Boy once said to his father, Lame Bull: "You talk so much about Ni:həhat. He was a superhuman. He should have been prayed to." "No," Lame Bull replied, "he never told the people to pray to him, but told them to pray to the Supreme Being. He was a man and not worthy to be prayed to."

Earthmaker was the human being, apparently a or the primeval keeper of the Flat Pipe, who knowing the earth was to be covered with water made a raft of logs on which he and the Flat Pipe floated during the great flood.²² (See full story, No. 3 in Appendix.) Where he came from is unknown. Landing on a mountain top he there made dry land (not *the* earth, the terrestrial globe as such which already existed), and also made a man and woman. He gave the Flat Pipe into the keeping of the man he had made, and taught him the Flat Pipe rite, instructed him how to carry out the rite and to plant tobacco, and told the people how to worship the Supreme Being. The Flat Pipe rite has been known ever since that time. Earthmaker is mentioned only in the Flat Pipe rite. After giving the pipe and the above instructions, he disappeared, and what became of him, whether he died or not, is not known.

Ghosts were called tsē:k. Another name for ghosts was byi'te:' a word that "gives the impression like a hollow-eyed bleached-out skull." An occasional ancestral ghost became the guardian helper of a surviving relative.²³ Gambling power might also be gotten from a ghost. Most ghosts were in their own future abode and did not have any contact at all with the living. In general, apart

²² He was not floating in the Pipe bowl; this is the Arapaho version.

²³ In 1948 The Boy explained: "Tciya:təwu:nitān (see p. 19) are not tsē:k; tsē:k is the opposite of everything good—you can cuss by calling someone tsē:k. Byi'te:' is even worse. The ancestral ghost is tsātuwa'a, not tsē:k. Shadow, soul, spirit, echo is batāto:u. [R.F.]

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sure will do that; they bother people and mock you when you talk or laugh." After that there was no ghost in that piece of brush. 775

On another occasion, Al was coming back on horseback with a group after a hand game. In a gap through which their route would take them, the others saw a yellow or blue light, like a lamp in the dark, moving this way and that. But Al could see nothing. The others went home by a roundabout way, but Al went alone through the gap, saw nothing, and met the others farther on. [825]

Many, though not all, ghosts had the habit of whistling, and some talked in a whistling language.

Ghosts were apt to appear as owls or to hoot like owls, both in the shaking tent rite, to be described later, and on other occasions as illustrated in the following story which had been told The Boy by his father, Lame Bull.

"Lame Bull went on a war expedition. Seven Sioux were killed. Their bodies were left laying where the killing took place. A few years later Lame Bull and some comrades came near this place. As they reached it, seven owls flew from it. The owls did not fly away but just milled around the spot. They were the seven Sioux turned into owls." [825]

Children used to be told: "If you do not obey, the owls will catch you." If owls alighted on a lodge or house or hooted around very near on bush, tree or hill, this presaged the death of some one. Owls also gave warnings.²⁶ In these instances however we got no evidence that the owls were conceived of as ghosts. 825 775

Besides the ghosts there were other bad spirits, who "shot" people by projecting some small object into the body of a person and so causing illness.²⁷ This belief, we were told, was very widespread but we did not obtain many details regarding it. The following incident, narrated by Coming Daylight, may serve as illustration. 776 753

On one occasion when Coming Daylight was living where Fort Belknap now is and when her daughter was still a sack baby, the latter would not quit screaming. She would hold her head to one side and would not nurse, and they could not satisfy her with

²⁶ An example is given in Flannery, 1953, p. 93.

²⁷ Very probably connected with practice of witchcraft. [R.F.]

- 776 anything. So Coming Daylight took her infant to her aunt who
753 was a kind of "spiritualist" (one having a ghost helper). The
aunt took the baby in her arms and told Coming Daylight: "You
get me a piece of charcoal." The aunt took the charcoal and rubbed
it on the baby's neck at the back, bent over as if she were going
to bite the infant, drew out (apparently by sucking) a little sliver
from the baby's neck, and said: "This is what caused her to
have a stiff neck." They said a spirit had shot her, although they
did not have the baby outside when this happened to her. You were
not supposed to take an infant outside in the dark without cover-
ing its head. Actually Coming Daylight's infant was inside the
tent during the night and they heard something hit a lodge pole
and it seemed to frighten the baby, who continued to cry until
the aunt removed the sliver.

- [158] Mental abnormality could also be caused by such bad spirits,
ghostly or other, whether by "shooting" the victim or getting into
751 him is not known. To keep the bad spirits at bay, a stick, with its
776 tip blackened with "nicotine," was left near a baby whenever the
baby had to be left alone. Whenever adults went out in the dark,
they picked up and carried a stick, of any kind; it was believed
that the spirits were afraid of the sticks and would not come near.
Beyond such protective observances there appears to have been
no cult proper of these bad spirits in the way of propitiatory
prayers or offerings.

- 753 Much, though not all sickness was ascribed to a malevolent
776 being called Atsa:. When illness recently took off a mother and
child in a family, the people said, "Atsa: has visited so-and-so's
family." Atsa: did not himself put sickness-causing objects in his
victims' bodies, but he was responsible indirectly for other kinds
of illness, that is, he had something to do with them. To him
[731] were attributed particularly epidemics, especially smallpox, chicken
pox and measles. He was an ugly, hideous being, unkempt, with
scaly skin and bushy hair who never washed his face. He was
thin and starved-looking and his nails were long. He was thoroughly
disliked. No food or pipe was ever offered to him. When serious
776 sickness visited the camp, the Supreme Being was prayed to:
"Take Atsa: away. He is causing a lot of trouble." Atsa: was

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"nothing compared to the Supreme Being." At an eclipse of the sun the Gros Ventres were much afraid; for they thought that the sun was covering himself and that Atsa: would come around. To ward him off on the occasion of a solar eclipse, the Gros Ventres in recent times would load their guns and shoot up in the air, and so make so much noise that he would be scared away. Then they would all laugh, feeling that they had gotten the best of him. Atsa: also functioned as a bugaboo. When Thomas Main was a boy his parents used to tell him: "If you don't behave, Atsa: will get you." Atsa: was afraid of skunks, as the Gros Ventres of several generations ago learned from the following incident, related by The Boy."

"In the days of Gopher and Prairie Dog Old Man, Atsa: declared war. At that time the Gros Ventres were very numerous. There were only twelve bands but they were so big and there were so many people that when the children played around they would get lost and could not find their way home. When the crier walked around and made his announcements, after only one circle around the camp he was hoarse and was tired from walking. A large part of Gros Ventres went off on a war raid to the east to fight the Shoshoni, Assiniboiné and Sioux. They got a little below the confluence of the Milk and Missouri Rivers, and saw two corpses wrapped in good blankets up in a tree. So they cut the bundles loose and dropped the bodies to the ground. The blankets, of white-man make, were a novelty to the Gros Ventres at the time. The men unwrapped the blankets and cut them up for leggings.

"That same night one of the Gros Ventres took ill. As the night wore on he got worse and worse. The men began to suspect: 'These two must have died of smallpox.' The sick man died after sun-up in the morning. They became panic-stricken. 'Sure enough,' they said, 'that's smallpox.' They decided to rush back to the main camp.

"On the way back every night one or more men died. Only a few got back alive. Most of the party died on the way back. When

* The incident probably is part of the tradition of the smallpox epidemic of 1780. Cf. Flannery, 1953, p. 34.

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539 the survivors reached home and told their story, the people were
731 excited. The old people said: 'That is a bad sickness. It all but
776 kills off the tribe once it starts.' The criers announced to the
people: 'Scatter in all directions. That is the only way to combat
this sickness.' So the bands scattered in all directions. A lot of
the people died, some even before camp was broken.

"One band went up Milk River. One man of this band who had
a big family studied what he should do. He decided to go off
secretly from his band. He had plenty of meat, as it was in the
fall. So he sneaked away unnoticed with his family, went up the
Milk River looking for the thickest patch of brush and trees he
could find, and there pitched his camp. The next spring, the sur-
vivors of this man's band, which had wintered around the Sweet
Grass Hills, decided that the sickness was over, and that Atsa:
must be in a good humor again and had left them. The survivors
went looking for the rest of the Gros Ventres, so they packed up
and left their camp, where in many lodges all the inmates were
dead. They made their way toward the place where the Marias
and Teton Rivers empty into the Missouri. As they went along
they found some whole camps wiped out by smallpox, other camps
with just a few lodges with some survivors. These survivors would
then join them. At last they reached the Marias and decided to
camp there and send scouts around to look for the other survivors.

"A group of young men acting as scouts went down the river to
its confluence with the Missouri and ran onto a camp where they
saw someone walking around in front of a lodge. As soon as this
person saw them he disappeared. They approached and looked
into the lodge, but could at first see only a bunch of dead bodies
in it, though the fire was burning. They then went in to investigate
and found a small boy and small girl there, each living with the
dead body of his and her mother. The boy and girl fought and
bit like animals not to be taken away. The young men saw the
places where the boy and girl had been sleeping beside the bodies
of the dead mothers. They saw also a bear that lived in this lodge
and fed on the corpses. They looked in other lodges and found
that the bear must have lived there too on the dead bodies. It
had not eaten of the supply of meat which was still untouched.

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"The young men then took the boy and girl back to camp where some families took them and tamed them down. The young men kept scouting for survivors along the Missouri River and on both sides of the Bear Paw Mountains but could find none. All the living then moved to the north end of the Bear Paws and camped. They decided to stay there and wait. Most of the Gros Ventre camps had been entirely wiped out. The survivors felt bad about it, but there was plenty to eat. They had taken along with them the meat supplies of the deceased victims. It was now far along in spring and they thought the danger was over.

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"The man who had spent the winter in the thick timber now decided to move around and look for his people. He started toward Marias River and found the other Gros Ventre survivors' camp north of the Bear Paws. The man, his wives and all their children had come through the epidemic without sickness. The people asked the father: 'How did you escape getting sick?' He replied: 'Just by accident. I happened to kill a skunk, to windward of our camp, and just left the carcass at the spot, as I had no use for it. We were forced to smell it. In time we all got used to the stench. In the timber we felt safe from enemies and we dared not go far from camp. So we stayed there in spite of the skunk. But we were all the time worried lest the children or myself should die. As time went on and no one got sick, I laid our good fortune to the skunk carcass. I thought that Atsa: must be afraid of skunks. So I started to kill as many as I could and I hung them around in every direction, so that no matter from what quarter the wind blew we always had skunk smell. I honestly believe skunks are too much for him.' The people agreed with him, for he proved his belief by the fact that he and all his family had come back safe. Since then the Gros Ventres have known that Atsa: is afraid of skunks."²⁹

Both giants and dwarfs were believed to exist. The giants were as tall as trees. When one of these got a buffalo he would stick it on his belt just as the Indian did with rabbits. The giants were

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²⁹ The Gros Ventres know that the Cree of the Ft. Belknap area use skunk fluid for many medical purposes; the Gros Ventres however do not. In Gros Ventres lore the animal kingdom calls the skunk "Chief Stripe."

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● 776 not cannibals; the dwarfs or little people were. Of the latter, who were distinct from the dwarfish pictograph beings previously mentioned, the Gros Ventres were afraid, for these dwarfs in spite of their small size were very powerful. They were not "false persons," but had bodies and lived on earth. The Gros Ventres when traveling around or out hunting were always on the watch for them; for the dwarfs, while very stupid, were very strong physically, could not be killed,²⁰ and were fast runners. Once they sighted a man there was no escaping them. Some of their characteristics are illustrated in a folk tale. (See No. 9 in Appendix.)

Besides the beings to whom some sort of cult was rendered or who at least were in modern times actively helpful or harmful in some manner to the living Gros Ventres, there were a number of others to whom no cult was rendered and who had only in the past been helpful or harmful. These last, such as Blood-Clot and Found-in-the-Grass, belong purely to the realm of folklore. Few myths and tales of this type were volunteered by our informants but two are given in the Appendix (Nos. 10 and 11). We made no attempt, however, to record the folklore as such.

²⁰ In 1948 The Boy explained: "In one way these little fellows were not so stupid after all, because they left their hearts at home in their lodges when they went off and so they were hard to kill. You should add, too, that they were all left-handed." [R.F.]

CHAPTER VII

CURING PRACTICES

- 580 A good many Gros Ventres through quest or otherwise acquired doctoring power. To give a better idea of it we shall need to see it against the larger background of native concepts of the cause and cure of illness.

CAUSES OF ILLNESS

- 753 Some illnesses were ascribed to solely or mainly natural agents or agential causes, others to supernatural ones. The line between the two types of causation is not, however, always clear.

- 753 Sometimes supernaturally caused ailments followed automatically from the breach of taboos, others were inflicted intentionally
784 by non-human or by human agents.

Marrow bones were not supposed to be broken inside a lodge or house, and a person who transgressed this taboo would suffer from sore legs. The penalty of fits, cramps and paralysis from certain actions to or by keepers of the Flat and Feathered Pipes has been previously noted.

- 753 The chief sender of sickness, particularly of epidemics such as smallpox and measles, was the being, Atsa:. This being appears
776 likewise to have had something to do indirectly with other ailments, but exactly what part he had in causing such ailments could not be cleared up by us. The intrusion of pathogenic objects into the body to cause illness was not attributed to Atsa: personally.

- 753 Malevolent spirits,—whether ghostly or other is not clear,—would cause illness by “shooting” people, that is, by projecting some small object into the body of the victim. To the maleficent
158 activity of these spirits was also ascribed mental derangement, at least in some cases. One such mentally deranged woman was once seen by Coming Daylight. This woman who was getting along in years became deranged all of a sudden. Coming Daylight, with the consent of the woman's husband, went to her lodge and peered in.

4: Flannery & Cooper E-5 (1939-1945) 1946
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

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525 time. This latter aspect of the belief accorded with the larger Gros Ventre
789 pattern: any acquisition of special supernatural power sought by quest would be apt to lead to shortening of life.

Nevertheless, against the reiterated advice of parents and elders who would so lecture the growing children and of the chiefs and counsellors who would walk around the camp so warning the people, a good many individuals would seek supernatural power, and a few would go out in quest of supernatural gambling power. In some cases such gambling power was sought by a man who had lost heavily or lost his all at the wheel or hand game, as a desperate measure to recoup his losses and to get a new start in his career.

Gambling power was not sought from the Supreme Being, who apparently did not enter at all into the gambling cycle. The appeal to him in the previously given traditional story of gambling for scalps is more a confirmation of than an exception to the rule. Nor was it sought as other power—to be a great warrior or doctor or to acquire wealth or to live long—was sought, by fasting and dreaming on the hill tops. The seeker for gambling power resorted to the brush and timber along watercourses to obtain it from the prairie chickens, or from a ghost. It was more commonly gotten from prairie chickens; but not infrequently from a ghost, not an ancestor of the candidate, at least not necessarily, but, as The Boy put it laughingly, from "any good-natured ghost." This power was gotten for use only in the hand game, not in any other gambling game or sport.

[76] Usually the seeker looked for a place where wild morning glories formed a sort of bower, "like a little lodge or tipi." It was in there that a ghost was believed to live; the morning glory was called *tzek'un@anādzu*, "ghost rope" (*tzek*" or *tsá'k*", "ghost"). The seeker would cry and cry, and when he got sleepy he would crawl into the bower and sleep. Pretty soon a ghost or prairie chicken might ask him: "Why are you punishing yourself so much?" He might answer: "Because I have lost all my belongings." "Is that all? Well, I will help you out," the being or beings would say, and then would give the seeker a song and tell him what rules he must live by and how he must act in the hand game. The person who got such power would not afterwards reveal the details told him by the giver. From the prairie chicken or ghost the person might also get at the same time the power to do marvelous things, such as making an object disappear, swallowing it and then drawing it out of some part of his body, making it go into his skull and come out of his mouth into his hand or go through his veins and come out somewhere else on his person, and so forth (cf. Red Whip story *infra*.)

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of men, including Stiff Arm, a noted Gros Ventre medicine ¹¹⁴man, who has since died. Only a few details were obtained: the ⁷⁸⁷rite within a regular tepee with spectators present; the tying of the performer with ropes, his escape therefrom, and after his escape the ropes in a ball which could not be untied; the summoning of the spirit of the deceased relative by the performer; the shaking of the tent "as in a cyclone" when the spirit came; talking "from above" by the spirit; singing by the performer and by the others in the tepee.

Later in August-September, 1939 and 1940, fuller information on the shaking tent rite was secured in connection with a general study of Gros Ventre society and religion, from The Boy and Thick, two of the older and best informed men among the Gros Ventres. These fuller data here follow.

Spiritual helpers among the Gros Ventres were of two kinds, ghosts of deceased persons and beings who had never been men. ^[776] The latter, the ordinary guardian spirits, by far the more common, do not concern us here as they do not enter at all into the Gros Ventre shaking tent rite. Only ghosts so enter.

A ghost helper, *tsatsawâ*² (-â- and superior a nasalized), ⁷⁷⁶was usually acquired in the following way. It was not sought by ⁷⁸⁷fasting and crying out on the hills, the customary procedure for acquiring non-ghostly guardian spirits and power. In fact there was either no quest of any kind or at most a somewhat indirect one. The usual sequence was as follows. A surviving relative would keep in his or her possession some memento or keepsake—something the deceased had prized greatly, some belonging such as a whip, or a tooth or bit of hair of the departed one. The keepsake was kept, not worn. It was kept not for the purpose of acquiring the ghost of the deceased relative (a father or other close relative), but solely or at least chiefly, so far as I could gather, out of regard for the departed. ^[765 768]

In most cases where such mementos were kept nothing happened. In some few cases, however, the keeping led to the acquisition of a ghost helper by the keeper. The first intimations the keeper had of the intentions of the deceased relative were knockings, or whistlings, or other kinds of disturbance around

787 where the memento was kept. After a while the ghost would
 776 come to the keeper, the surviving relative, on successive visits
 and talk to him (or her), telling him its intention of becoming
 his ghost helper, and finally putting him in a deep sleep ("kill-
 ing" him) and saying to him: "I shall be your *tsatsawâ*." In
 other words, it was the ghost, not the surviving relative, who
 regularly took the initiative and broke the ice. In fact, the latter
 had little or no freedom to accept or refuse.

By the ghost the survivor in trance would be taught the pro-
 cedure to use for summoning and dealing with the ghost, how to
 put incense in the smudge place in the person's own lodge, how
 to lay the pipe, the direction of stem and bowl, what kind of food
 to put out, and so forth. A key element in such teaching was a
 special song, given by the ghost to be sung in said rite. One
 776 such song, recorded by me in 1940 as sung by The Boy but not
 787 yet transcribed, a wordless song sung to the accompaniment of a
 791 drum, had belonged to a woman named "Woman." She had
 [533] been taught it by the ghost of her deceased husband (or brother),
Wawathana'tea * (*a*'s nasalized) "Bad-bad Bull." He had been
 a medicine man when still living, and this had been his "power"
 song. His ghost gave it to her both as the song to summon his
 ghost with and as a doctoring song. She had therefore both
 ghost-summoning and doctoring power. While that old woman
 had both a ghost helper and doctoring power, the two things did
 not necessarily go together in the same person. One could have
 a ghost helper without having doctoring power, and vice versa.
 No one lacking a ghost helper could conduct the shaking tent
 rite, no matter how great power he had received by fasting and
 crying, and no matter what guardian spirit or spirits he had ac-
 quired. After her husband's death the above old woman had
 not married. People were a little afraid of her because she had
 this ghost helper. She was a capable old woman, with lots of
 horses; some of her breed of horses are still (1940) around. She
 died around 1907.

* Owing to delays and difficulties under present war conditions in obtain-
 ing symbols not in our printer's stock *a* and *e* with a stroke above them are
 here printed in italics.

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Other songs, distinct from this summoning or shaking tent rite song, were also given and taught at times by ghost helpers. Two of them, both victory songs, were recorded as sung by The Boy in 1940. These two were given on occasions other than that on which the surviving relative initially acquired his ghost helper. 776
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After all the above teaching was concluded, the ghost of the deceased relative belonged to the survivor and was supposed to come whenever summoned by the latter in the manner the ghost told him while in trance to do. A great many Gros Ventre men and women had guardian spirits and "power" acquired by fasting and crying or otherwise. But fewer individuals, men and women, had ghost helpers. My informants in 1939 and 1940 could recall only four persons in the last two generations or last 70 years or so who had had ghost helpers.

In one case (see first of the two appended stories by Thick) two spirits tried to come to the shaking tent rite conducted by Woman, one bad and the other good, but whether the bad one was one of her deceased relatives or not, she never knew. The people were under the impression that the bad one was an intruder who used to come first and try to "horn in" on the proceedings. No case of a given person clearly having more than one ghost helper was recalled by my informants.

Ordinary "power" could be and often was transferred by the possessor to another person by donation or bequeathment. But a ghost helper never was so transferred and could not be. [424]

It may be added that neither my informants, The Boy and Thick, nor my interpreter, Thomas Main, all highly intelligent and informed men, were at all sure of the etymology of the word *tsatsawâ*². The Boy thought it might connote the meaning of "slave," "some one who is forced to do things." Thomas Main suggested a possible relationship to *tsatsa*—"coming, flight"; plus—*wa*, an old Gros Ventre word, meaning unknown. The two words for ordinary ghosts as such are *tsa-k'a* (sing.; pl. *tsa-k'an*; a's as u in English but), and *bie'te'e* (sing.; pl. *bi'eten*). *Tsatsawâ*² is used exclusively for ghost helpers, not for an ordinary ghost, or ghosts in general. An ordinary medicine man was called *nata'nhehi* (a's as u in but), but there was no special name 791
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791 in use to designate those who had a ghost helper: of him or her
787 it was merely said: "He (or she) has a tsatsawâ'a."

Persons who had a ghost helper commanded great respect, and were bothered by no one. But capable medicine men on whom the people depended to doctor their sick were also greatly respected. My informants did not feel that either class of practitioners as such had greater prestige than the other.

787 In the shaking tent rite, no other spirits than the given ghost
● 776 had any part, and only the one ghost ever had part in a given performance. Neither guardian spirits, nor the "Little Spirit," nor Ba'a', nor the Supreme Being (Isteib'n'a't'a; the a before t nasalized) enters into it in any manner. The summoned ghost came not from any of these or their abodes, but from Basna'abe'e, [775] the Big Sand, whither the souls of all Gros Ventres, except murderers of their own tribesmen, went after death and lived.

The function of the ghost helper was to give knowledge about past, present, future, or distant happenings, and counsel and direction in illness or danger. He imparted information. He did not as such grant power. Some of the many things he would be questioned about were: How a war expedition under way or an impending battle, or an illness, would come out? Where were the enemy located and what were their plans? Who had stolen a certain valuable article and where was it? He was not asked questions about trivial or silly matters, or about the fidelity or infidelity of a wife, although he sometimes volunteered information on such things. If some noted or loved person were critically ill, the ghost helper might be summoned and if it said: "His (the sick person's) soul is already over there," this meant he was going to die.

787 Where the services of one who had a ghost helper were desired,
791 the usual procedure was for the client or clients to go to him (or her) and offer him a pipe to smoke—this in accordance with general Gros Ventre practice in enlisting the aid of anyone with any kind of power. Those who had ghost helpers were commonly reluctant or even afraid to summon their helper; after the performance they felt tired and sore. But if given a pipe to call the

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ghost, they could not refuse, at least not easily. And if they ac-⁷⁸⁷
cepted the pipe, they committed themselves definitely. ⁷⁹¹

The summoning rite was performed only at night, with the fire out, regardless of the severity of the weather, and in darkness. In the two narratives by The Boy appended infra the ghost helper spoke in the daytime, but had been summoned the preceding night. The rite was ordinarily performed in the performer's lodge, he being hidden out of sight of the clients or spectators behind a blanket-curtain hung up for this purpose to partition off a segment of the lodge. Away from the camp, the rite was sometimes performed in an emergency shelter or a sweat lodge. Before the rite, the clients got ready a pipe and tobacco, a dish of puppy meat (an earlier Gros Ventre delicacy), and other food. ^[262] and at the appointed time for the rite brought these to the lodge of the ghost-possessor.

The performer was then bound with thongs. The four fingers (thumb too?) of each hand were tied tightly together by interlacing them (somewhat after the technique of wrapped or twined basketry), the hands were tied behind the back, he was rolled in his blanket and tied around securely with thongs, with only his head protruding, and then was deposited behind the blanket partition out of sight of the spectators.

It appears to have been a common practice for the performer to challenge the most skeptical member of the party, and ask him to do the tying. Various stories of skeptics were narrated to me.

On one occasion when the main body of the Gros Ventres, then ⁷⁸⁷
at war with the Piegan (or Blackfoot), were camped on the east ⁷⁷⁶
side of Judas River and a small band of them on the west side, the ghost helper of one of the Gros Ventres in the small band told them: "Tell the people to leave this small camp and go across the river to the big one, for the enemy is going to raid tonight." But many of the Gros Ventres of the small band said: "Ghosts are big liars. We are not cowards to run." Of the skeptics many remained, while about half crossed back to the big camp. About dawn, the enemy came as the ghost had predicted and nearly all who had remained at the small camp were massacred.

On another occasion when the Gros Ventres had (or were

787 about to have) a big battle with the Crows at Marias (at the
776 junction of the Marias with the Missouri), a young man who
was present at a ghost helper rite, with the fires out and pitch-
darkness in the lodge, and who doubted that a ghost could come
back, decided to experiment. When the ghost helper came and
the noise was heard, the young man, who was sitting near the
door in the darkness where no one else could see he was exposed,
pushed his breechclout aside and exposed his genitals, saying to
himself: "If this is really a ghost, he will see me and do some-
thing about it." All of a sudden the young man let out a yell as
if hit by someone, and ran out of the lodge. "You had better
run. What is being done here is the real thing," said the ghost
to the young fellow, and added to the crowd: "I hit that young
fellow's genitals sharply with a stick; that is why he dashed out
of the lodge." They then asked the young man: "Is that what
happened?" And he replied: "Yes. He hit me good and hard
there," and he became a believer.

This emphasis on skeptics in non-narrative and narrative ac-
counts of the Gros Ventre shaking tent rite would suggest that
the rope-escaping feat, which we may call for short the "Hou-
dini trick," had the purpose, overt or covert, of creating or con-
firming faith in the authenticity of the ghostly visitation.

The Houdini trick ordinarily formed part of the Gros Ventre
shaking tent rite, but to judge from a couple of the stories ap-
pended to this paper, was not absolutely indispensable and could,
in emergency, be omitted.

791 Right after being tied, the ghost-possessor to the accompani-
787 ment of his drum sang his summoning song which the ghost had
776 given him. As the ghost helper approached the lodge, a whistling
as of wind could be heard, and sometimes at least an owl call,—
owls and ghosts are closely associated in Gros Ventre thought,
ghosts appearing or speaking as owls. As the ghost came through
the top of the lodge, the top would shake violently, and then the
whole lodge would shake.

The ghost would then go to the performer and blow on him,
and all the sinews and thongs with which he was tied would be-
come untied, and they would be rolled in a ball so knotted and

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tangled that it could not itself be easily unravelled and would so be thrown out at the spectators, or at the one who had done the tying, especially if he were a skeptic, with some such challenge to him from the ghost as: "You tied up this person. Now see if you can untangle this ball of thong." 791
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Next the pipe would be lit and held up in the darkness in the direction where the ghost was supposed to be, for the ghost to smoke, and the spectators would see the pipe glow up rhythmically every time the ghost drew on it. The people in the lodge would finish smoking this pipe. After this the ghost would ask: "People, why did you send for me?" They would tell him what they wanted to know. If the ghost knew the answer offhand, he would answer at once. If he did not know, he would say: "I don't know. I'll go and find out. You sing that song again [the one the ghost taught the performer when he first chose the latter; no other song was sung] and I'll come back and tell you."

As soon as the ghost went out, a little fire would be made, and the spectators had a smoke. Then they put out the fire and sang the ghost song. They would not have to wait long, "for a ghost travels just about as fast as a man thinks." On returning it would give the information that had been sought of it.

Most ghosts talked a whistling talk. But some—those possessed by Plenty-dry-meat-old-man and by Morning-star, two old men whose ghost helpers were among the greatest ones remembered and whose prophecies always came true—talked just in a natural voice.

After the ghost helper had given the information desired (or perhaps earlier, after his smoke at the beginning; I could not clear up the point) he was offered the food that had been prepared. And the spectators, still in the dark, would hear the tapping of the ghost's fingernails on the plate or other sound of eating as the ghost partook of some of the food.

When he had finished eating, he would say something like: "If you are done with me, I shall go," and he would depart by way of the top of the tent, which would shake violently as it had done when the ghost first arrived in it. After the ghost helper had taken his final departure, the performer would come out

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from behind the blanketed enclosure, the fire would be re-lighted, the performer would say the prayer customary among the Gros Ventres before all meals to the Supreme Being and other beings, then he or she and the others present would eat the food that had remained from the ghost's repast. Finally they would all sit around smoking and chatting a while before dispersing. I failed to gather any information on whether the performer receives any payment or not for his or her services in the rite.

Certain simplifications of the above procedure under emergency conditions as on war expeditions are noted or intimated in a couple of the following four narratives, the first two given by The Boy, the last two by Thick.

NARRATIVE 1

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The following story was told by The Boy.

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"A certain man had his deceased father as his ghost helper.

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The ghost helper used to speak Gros Ventre just like living people but in a bass voice. Everybody understood him when they heard him.

"On one occasion the Gros Ventre tribe were camped near the forks of the Teton and Marias Rivers. While there a large group of the men decided to go on the warpath. So they left the main camp, went up the Missouri River and camped that first night at the mouth of Crow Creek where it empties into the Missouri River. When it was dark that night some of the men said: 'Let's offer the pipe to X [the one mentioned above who had the ghost helper: name not given] and ask him to find out whether our prospects on this war party are good or bad.' So they filled up a pipe and went to X, held out the pipe to him and asked him: 'Accept the pipe and call your spirit.'

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"X accepted willingly and soon after they had smoked the pipe together they made a shelter where X was to do the spirit-rite. So they tied up X, filled the pipe again, put it there and sang a song four times. When they were singing it the fourth time they heard a voice in the air. The ghost helper arrived and the shelter shook as a lodge would have done in the same rite. When the spirit hit the ground, the ground shook too. The spirit

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seemed excited and kept repeating: 'What do you want, my children?' and added: 'If you were in my place and were as old and feeble as I am, you wouldn't like to be disturbed. But here I am. What do you want?' They answered: 'We want to know how this venture of ours is going to turn out,—well or badly.' Then they lit the pipe and offered it to the spirit and they could see from the rhythmic glaring of the pipe that the ghost helper was smoking. After he had smoked he replied: 'Well, I don't know offhand. I'll have to look around and investigate. I am going away to look around. While I am gone you smoke and after a while sing again and I'll come back.' The ghost helper went away with a noise and commotion as always.

"They sat around and smoked and after a while sang again. The ghost helper came back blowing as if catching his breath, as an old man does, and said: 'My children, Crow Indians without number are invading the camp you just left. Knowing you men are away they are so bold that they are peeping into the lodges at your women and watching them playing the hand game. Your women are in happy mood. These Crow Indians seem to be preparing to take all the Gros Ventre horses. I shall go back and watch to see what they will do. Meanwhile you do as you did before: sit around and smoke and then sing. I'll come back and make a final report.' And so they talked and smoked and sang.

"Then the ghost helper came back bringing with him one hair from the head of a Crow. This was not a scalp but was only a hair representing a scalp and was wrapped around a piece of sagebrush. It was brought to convince the Gros Ventres there was no danger. Then the ghost helper reported: 'The Crows have taken practically all your horses and about sun-up will arrive where you now are. You need have no fear of the Crows provided you do just one thing. Be sure to kill the Crow with the blue blanket coat (with hood). He is the one brave man in the crowd. Kill him first and you will kill all the others. None of the Gros Ventres will be actually killed, but two of them will be wounded. In case you do not kill the Crow with the blue coat the outcome of the battle will be doubtful. But if you kill the

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787 Crow with the blue coat you will kill all the Crows and get your
 ● 776 horses back.' The Gros Ventres asked the ghost helper which
 539 two of their party would be wounded, but were not told by the
 ghost helper. If they had been told they would not have let
 these two go into battle.

"By the time they were through with the spirit it was near
 daylight. So they decided not to go to sleep, but to wait up the
 rest of the night. [Here followed a long detailed description of
 the battle with the Crows beginning around daylight.] The
 Crow with the blue coat escaped. Of the sixty Crows in all,
 forty were killed. No Gros Ventres were killed, but two were
 wounded—two members of my own [The Boy's] clan. While
 the party was still at the war camp, some distance from the
 main camp, the ghost helper came and said: 'I came to hear the
 news. Did you kill the man with the blue coat?' They an-
 swered: 'No.' The ghost helper said: 'It is your own fault. If
 you had, you would have killed all the Crows. But anyhow you
 did well and have done yourselves credit. I am going to teach
 [727] you a victory song so you can sing it when you get back to camp.'
 So he taught them this victory song² and they learned it and he
 said to them: 'Well, my children, I am going home. When I get
 back to my place of abode I will celebrate that victory too. I
 will give you charcoal [it was the custom for returning victors to
 paint themselves black] and I'll bring charcoal to my own land
 and celebrate.'

"The foregoing incident happened in the time of my [The
 Boy's] grandfather, Crow Moccasin."

NARRATIVE 2

The story which here follows was also told by The Boy.

"The Gros Ventres were camped east of (the site of) Lewis-
 town (south of the Missouri River). A party of Gros Ventre
 warriors left the camp to go on the warpath against the Sioux.
 One of this Gros Ventre party was known to have a ghost helper.

² This song as sung by The Boy was recorded in the field in 1940, to-
 gether with about 120 other Gros Ventre songs, but I have not found it pos-
 sible, as yet, to get any of the records transcribed for publication.

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The party traveled north and when they arrived at the river they camped there. Some of the men said: 'Morning-star-appears (or Morning-star-is-up: the man with the ghost helper) should be approached to find out what our prospects are on this expedition.' It was agreed among themselves that they would make a sweat lodge.

"Among those invited to sweat was Morning-star-appears. While they were sweating they offered the pipe to him to get him to call his helper. He agreed. Then they all smoked and got ready in the sweat lodge. [79]

"The ghost helper came to the sweat lodge for the possessor was right there. Just before the helper alighted he whistled violently and rapidly. Then the sweat lodge shook and they heard the ghost helper say: 'What do you want? Why did you call me?' They said: 'We are going on the warpath after the Sioux. What success will we have? Is there any danger?' So they offered the lighted pipe to the ghost helper and saw it smoked by him. After smoking, the ghost helper said: 'I'll go and see first before I answer. You go ahead and smoke and after a while sing again.' This they did.

"The ghost helper came back in the usual way, and highly elated, and said: 'All right, I am ready to tell you. First here is a strand of hair of a man (a Sioux) whom you will kill tomorrow. This represents his scalp.' It was wrapped around sagebrush. He continued: 'I have found a big Sioux camp on Beaver Creek [east of the Little Rocky Mountains]. The Sioux are having a big Grass Dance. The one who is having the most fun is the one you are to kill tomorrow. He is a handsome man and has a sword. You will capture that sword when you kill him. Don't be afraid. No Gros Ventre will be killed but two of you Gros Ventres don't look good to me.' They said to the ghost helper: 'Name the two.' But he refused to do so, saying: 'Just don't be afraid. Go ahead to the place where the Sioux are and attack them. Choose now what kind of weather you wish after the fight tomorrow, and I will see that the weather will be that way.' They failed, however, to make a choice. The ghost helper also said: 'Every once in a while tomorrow take

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787 a look at the sun. There will be all kinds of sundogs tomorrow.
 ● 776 changing every little while. When they appear you will know
 539 that I have told you the truth.

"Then the ghost helper left and the Gros Ventres slept until early morning. [Here followed a long description by The Boy of the battle.] Just one Sioux was killed in the battle, a very handsome man with a sword, as the ghost helper had predicted. Likewise they saw the sundogs changing. The Gros Ventres, however, after this first skirmish realized that the Sioux would soon get reorganized and that their own situation was perilous. So they called on Morning-star-appears to cause such weather that the Sioux could not catch them. He sang his song, using his robe as a cover in which to enclose himself, and said: 'We wish rain.' At once a cloud appeared and in a short time grew into a great black storm cloud; then came a perfect cloudburst, with thunder and lightning, in which you couldn't see any distance. Under this cover the Gros Ventres escaped from the pursuing Sioux and got back to camp safely with no loss of life, although two of their number had had narrow escapes, just as the ghost helper had said: 'Two of you do not look good to me.'

"The above occurred in Stiff Arm's time, when he was a young man. The man who killed the Sioux was Crazy Bull. I do not recall the name of the ghost helper, but this same ghost helper on this occasion taught the Gros Ventres a song to use in their celebration after the victory."

NARRATIVE 3

787 The following two stories were told me by Thick.

539 "A certain old woman (her great-great-grandchild is still living) had a ghost helper. Her name was 'Woman' but for various reasons she was nicknamed 'Bear Old Woman.' When I was about ten years old a party of Gros Ventres was camped at Lodge Pole, about two miles from the Little Rocky Mountains. One night Cree enemies came and stole all the Gros

2 This song as sung by The Boy was recorded in 1940.

787 back. He returned to his place to the southeast of the old
539 woman and sat down.

791 " Then Bear Old Woman said: ' All right. Start to sing now.'
They sang four times without stopping, the song belonging to the
old woman's ghost helper. As they were singing the third time
they heard an owl and the old woman said: ' Don't receive *that*
spirit. He is bad. Continue singing.' So they continued and
just as they finished the fourth time the old woman said: ' That
is the one. Receive *that* spirit.' The people around heard these
two owls.

787 " When the second owl lighted on top of the lodge, the top
539 shook and the ghost helper spoke: ' What do you want me for? '

796 They said: ' We want you to tell us where our horses are and
who has them so we can find them.' The ghost helper answered:
' All right. I'll have to go look for them, but you go ahead and
smoke this pipe [the one lying near the incense hearth]. When
you have smoked up what is in the pipe, refill it and put it back
in the same place and wait.'

" They had barely started smoking when the ghost helper was
back again. So they just dumped out what was left in the pipe
and refilled it. The helper said: ' Never mind. I am hungry and
want to eat.' But they didn't mind him. The spirit then said:
' Your horses are not very far away from here. Your four
friends have already recaptured your horses and are bringing
them back.' He also said to my father: ' One of your horses
has a thick broad rawhide rope around his neck and is dragging
it, and that other man's mare's colt will play out on the trip back
home.'

" After the helper had said all this, the four men judged that
he was through, so they took the pipe and lit it and offered the
helper a smoke. The inside of the old woman's lodge was dark
as there was no fire. The helper took the pipe from their hands
and then they saw it light up rhythmically as a pipe does when
it is puffed, and after taking a few puffs the helper said to the
men: ' You smoke the rest. I am hungry and want to eat.'
They could hear him chewing on the dog meat inside where the
woman was. After a while the helper said to the men: ' Here.

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You can eat the rest of this pup.' The meat had been eaten off of one hind leg of the pup so that just the bones were left. Then the ghost helper said: 'I see this foolish old woman lying here helpless.' Then they heard a noise as if the helper had struck the old woman with the flat of his hand and he was heard blowing. The next instant the ghost helper said: 'Here, try to untie this, and the knotted sinew and rawhide thong hit the chest of the man who had tied her up.

"Then they heard the old woman give a long sigh. She had been in a trance all this time and was just coming out of it. Next the ghost helper said: 'Now I am going to leave you.' And they heard the same racket at the top of the lodge they had heard when he first came in and there was a violent shaking of the whole lodge, especially at the top of it.

"After the ghost helper was gone they kindled the fire again and there was light. Bear Old Woman came out of the enclosure and sat down on the bed and prayed with the bowls of food in her hand. Then she and the men ate and afterwards sat around and smoked and chatted. Then the men went home and told what the spirit had said.

"Next morning all the people in the camp, including the children, got up early and went up on the highest nearby ground to look for the four men coming back with the horses. Towards evening of the day the four Gros Ventres who had gone in pursuit of the thieves brought all the horses back, except the one which, as the spirit had said, had played out and could not stand the trip back. And one of my father's horses had a rope around its neck as the ghost helper had said it had. The pursuers had caught up with the Cree and surprised them asleep in a little swamp covered with grass and brush and so took the horses back home. On the return trip they got lost in a bad storm, went in the wrong direction and not until daylight did they discover their mistake and so had to circle their way back. They had neither eaten nor slept during all the two days and night they had been gone.

"The above incident occurred just at about the time when the buffalo disappeared from this part of the country [1880's]."

NARRATIVE 4

787 Here is the second story told me by Thick.

539 " There was a man by the name of Bird Child who had a ghost
791 helper. Bird Child's wife had four brothers, one of them my
father. One evening they filled a pipe and went to Bird Child's
lodge to get him to find out from his ghost helper where there
would be lots of buffalo and no danger, so they could go there
and hunt. When they arrived at Bird Child's lodge they found
him absent and only his wife in the lodge. Without invitation
they made themselves at home and asked their sister where Bird
Child was. She answered: 'I don't know where he is nor when
he will be back.'

797 " Being Bird Child's brothers-in-law they decided to take the
● 776 liberty of using Bird Child's power and ghost helper, and of hav-
539 ing a seance in his absence. They asked their sister where Bird
607 Child's bundle was. She showed them. One of the four brothers
took it down. They then agreed who was to be tied up and to
represent Bird Child. The one of the four designated agreed.
They had him lie down and two of them tied him up tight and
laid him in an enclosure made along the side of the tent [as in
preceding story]. They were half-fooling, not quite serious.
Their sister couldn't say anything: they imposed on her. They
even attached the man's hair to the ropes with which they bound
him in the robe until only his mouth was visible.

" Then they started to sing and sang the same song four times
without stopping. At the end they heard yelling in the air and
said: 'There he is. He has come for us.' As the ghost helper ar-
rived the tent shook and the helper said: 'Who's that lying back
there?' and answered himself: 'Some crazy man or someone
with no regard for anybody's rights.' Then they heard a commo-
tion behind the enclosure. The bound brother started to hollow
for mercy. Next one of the brothers who had done the tying got
hit with all the ropes tangled in a knot.

" Then they heard the bound man being thrown towards the
door, and saying: 'Hurry up and make a light before this ghost
helper kills me.' The spirit had picked him up and was trying

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to wedge him between the poles in the lodge. By this time, however, the other brothers had kindled a fire and of course as soon as the flame flared up the spirit was gone. The ghost helper was good and mad, but anyhow had come."

BLACKFOOT-BLOOD RITE

On a casual visit to Browning, Montana, in August, 1931, the writer was given some information by Mrs. Frances (Joseph) Brown of Browning on the Blackfoot shaking tent rite. The rite is performed by a woman who is a sort of "spiritualist" or "medium," as Mrs. Brown put it. She summons the dead spirits [spirit?] and they come and answer questions. Only she can understand the language of the dead spirits and can converse with them. She tells their answers to the other people who are around. During the rite, people are all around in the tipi. A curtain is put over a part of the interior of the tipi, and the "medium" sits behind the curtain. The lights are extinguished. Food is put on a plate. During the rite noises are heard "inside" [apparently behind the curtain], and everything moves, including the tent itself. It was emphasized to me that this rite is an old Indian one, not a modern intrusion of white spiritualistic seances.

While talking with The Boy (Gros Ventre) in August 1940 about the Gros Ventre ghost helper complex, he told me the following story that his friend, Platted Hair, a Blood from Canada, had told him on a visit to him some time before:

A long time ago, before the Gros Ventres came and when the Snakes still occupied this part of the country, a large party of Bloods came over toward the Little Rockies and never returned to their home country. Their people at home did not know what to make of it. One of the Bloods in the home camp had a ghost helper. So they gave this Blood a pipe to summon his ghost helper. When the ghost arrived, he asked: "Why did you send for me?" They said: "Our young men went on a war party and did not return. What has happened to them?" The ghost said: "I'll go and see. You may sing the song. I'll come back and I may be able to tell you what has happened." So the